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Robert Cohen

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THE PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE*

DR. ROBERT COHEN, M.D.**

The topic—"The problems of Marriage and Divorce"—is an interesting one, and I would like to present it to you from a very practical psychiatric standpoint. I'd like to present it to you in the manner in which I see it in my office, because frequently I am asked, by people in your profession, about some of the opinions that we in our profession have about people who are about to be divorced—whether or not divorce should actually occur.

Specifically, though, before we talk about divorce, which to me is certainly an evidence of unsuccessful marriage, we ought to talk about successful marriage.

Contrary to popular opinion, successful marriage is not "made in heaven." Rather, the components for success or failure in marriage are developed in the family relationships of the bride and the groom with their parents long before anyone had any thoughts of marriage—actually, in the first seven years of their lives, and, specifically, between the ages of three to seven years.

Astounding, you say? Not at all, I must answer; for it is during this period in the life of the future bride and groom that the attributes of future success or failure in marriage are developed. Successful marriage, psychologically, is predicated on three specific attributes: on the capacity for love, on normal attitudes about sex, and about conformity of the marriage partners to the demands of society and the culture in which we live. Let me take those up, one at a time, briefly.

Contrary to what perhaps you might have believed, the capacity for love is not inherent in everyone. Actually, the capacity for love has to be learned, because the infant at birth, far from being an individual capable of love, is the most selfish creature in the world. Love, from a psychiatric standpoint, is the ability to give of self to another person. It is actually a state of altruism.

The infant who starts as the most selfish creature in the world has to make a tremendous transition from the period of infancy and his selfishness to the place where he is sufficiently altruistic to

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** Dr. Cohen, a 1932 M.D. graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, is in the private practice of psychiatry and neurology in Denver. In addition to his practice, he serves as instructor in the University of Colorado Medical School, as consultant to Fitzsimons Hospital and Fort Warren Air Base, and in industrial psychiatry to Associated Management Consultants, Denver. Because of the wide interest in, and the professional relationships of many attorneys to, industrial affairs, Dr. Cohen will discuss in a forthcoming article, several aspects of industrial psychiatry.

be able to have the capacity for love, namely, the ability to give of self to another individual.

Where does this transition begin? How does it begin? It begins very, very early in life. It begins with the relationship between the infant and his or her mother. Remember that this very, very selfish creature, the infant, at the time of birth has very few needs. It has the needs for food, for rest, and for a clean, dry skin. Every infant has these needs. The manner in which the mother figure gives these needs to the infant begins to cause the infant to develop. He will develop into the individual who is going to remain a selfish creature or, through normal, successful transition, the individual who will be able to develop that capacity for love.

Let's say that this infant is sufficiently lucky to have a mother who loves him. The infant who has this kind of a mother is given its needs in a warm, affectionate, and, above all, consistent manner. The infant begins to develop the feeling, very early in life, that it can always count on its mother for getting these needs fulfilled today, tomorrow, next week, next month, and next year. The infant thus blessed with this kind of a consistent mother is the infant who is going to develop very early one of the key attitudes; a feeling of being wanted. This key attitude later develops into the self-confidence which is so necessary in the individual in the development of his capacity for love.

At the very beginning, then, we may easily formulate the infant's behavior into this statement: the selfish infant wants *what it wants, when it wants it*. It is wholly unconcerned with anything else and is totally unaware of the presence of anything else but itself.

However, beginning about the age of eighteen months to two and one-half years, the infant must begin to take cognizance of the thing that we call reality. The infant, for the first time, during something which perhaps you believe to have been a very insignificant type of thing, toilet training, is asked to begin to conform to the rules of society. This conformance is required by the demand or request by its mother that it do a certain thing in a certain specific place. The infant who has had a kind, affectionate, warm, loving mother is quickly able to learn that it must do what society asks, and it does so in a completely secure manner. It doesn't feel that to conform is dangerous; but it does get the feeling that no longer can it do what it wishes to do; it must now do something in conformity with the rule as put forth by its mother.

As this young individual begins to take cognizance of reality, the original behavior formula now changes from "I want what I want because I want it" to "I want what I want, *but if it is practical and in accordance with the rules of reality*." Still later, this kind of an infant, fortunate enough to have a consistently warm mother, is encouraged to become independent, and to do things on its own. Still later, this kind of an individual is taught morality by its

mother and father. It is taught morality in a very tolerant, easy manner, and, as soon as it is taught morality, the individual now once more changes the formula for its behavior, which now becomes, "I want what I want if it is practical and *if it is the right thing to do.*"

I have taken you very rapidly through the personality development of a normal individual who is thus able to develop the capacity for love, namely, the ability to give of self to another individual. That other individual, of course, later on will become his wife.

The second important feeling, attitude or attribute to a successful marriage is a normal attitude about sex. You who haven't the experience of a medical student, for instance, perhaps don't recognize that attitudes about sex are not always normal; not always the same.

Actually, attitudes about sex begin about the age of eighteen months when the child, in its seeking for finding out about itself and the world, in getting some response to its normal curiosity begins to ask its mother, primarily, and father, secondarily, "What is this?" and it's told, "This is my nose;" and, "What is this?" and it's told, "This is my ear." He comes down here and finds out that "this is my elbow" and "this is my chest" and "this is my hip" and then it happens on its genitals.

If this infant has a normal mother who is herself normally oriented and has normal attitudes about sex, the individual will get an honest response from her: "That is your penis; that is the organ with which you urinate." But, unfortunately, there are too many people in our society today who are themselves neurotic about sex. These people frequently will respond to the child, "We don't talk about that, that's dirty—or nasty—or sinful—or bad."

Remember, it's the same kind of mother who will gladly tell the child over and over again about the functions of its teeth, its hair, its skin, its locomotion; but when the child asks her a question in its innocent seeking for finding out about itself and gets to its genitals, the child gets a peculiar answer. This kind of an answer is the beginning of a peculiar attitude towards sex. From this start the child inevitably gets the feeling that there is something particularly peculiar about this part of it. That kind of an attitude frequently carries over—carries over to its adult life.

After the time of very early curiosity seeking, the child gets to the age of—let's say—eight, nine, or ten. This is a very important period also, because this is the period when the father should take his son and tell him about things—tell him about life—tell him how things occur. Similarly, with the little girl and her mother; the little girl should begin to know about the menstrual function from her mother.

The person who has had parents, themselves normal and non-neurotic, will get normal, honest answers from his parents, and, also, he will be told about the facts of life. The individual, on the

other hand, having a mother and father who are themselves unable to think normally about sex, becomes further disturbed about its sexual function because it gets an answer concerned with something bad, simple, nasty, dirty, peculiar. The kind of an individual who gets that kind of an answer gets to adolescence and begins to have the normal sexual feeling that Nature endows all of us with at that point. But this kind of an individual doesn't know what to do with these new found feelings. He doesn't know how to react normally toward the opposite sex.

The third important attribute of a successful marriage, psychologically, is the ability to conform with society's demands for the sex that each person happens to be. By this I mean that our society expects every male to be an independent, aggressive, competitive individual, able to take and handle responsibility and able to take care of another person, such as a wife. The female, ideally, in our culture, is supposed to be the more passive, the more dependent person.

These attitudes and feelings are supplied our children from their identification with their parents: this kind of identification specifically occurring about the age of three and one-half to seven. Normally, at the age of three and one-half the little boy becomes quite closely attached to his mother. The mother generally remains his unconscious love object until the age of seven, at which time, normally, he rejects his mother and should become attached to the father figure. It is only from his ability to get close to his father that the little boy is able to take on the normal, masculine traits concerned with aggressiveness, responsibility-taking, competitiveness, forcefulness, and so on.

Frequently this doesn't occur. Fathers, these days, are too busy. Some fathers wanted a daughter, perhaps, and got a son. Some fathers, unfortunately, as in the last war, were away from home during this very important, critical period. For these little boys who should have had the opportunity to identify with and become attached to their fathers, they had no choice but to remain attached to the mother figure. Don't get me wrong—I think mothers are fine people. But mothers, unfortunately, are female, and you can't possibly have a boy get from a female the attributes so necessary in our society for him to have, and which our society expects him to have.

Similarly, the little girl at the age of three and one-half, normally, becomes attached to the father figure and stays closely attached to the father until the age of about seven, at which time, normally, she rejects the father and becomes closely attached to her mother. It is due to this normal attachment to and with mother that she then is able to take on the normal feminine attributes that our society expects the female to have: the attributes of passivity and dependency, certainly to a fair degree.

These three attributes then, psychologically, are the important ones so far as successful marriage is concerned: the capacity

for love, normal attitudes about sex, and conformity of the marriage partners to and with the standards that our society expects of both males and females. And the real reasons for unsuccessful marriages—whether or not they may end in divorce—are found in the failure in or the lack of these three major attributes of successful marriages.

In my experience, most divorces, psychologically, are predicated first on emotional immaturity. Emotional immaturity is simply the negative aspects of the capacity for love. Quite simply, it is a state in which the individual doesn't show himself to be sufficiently grown up—compatible, that is, with his chronological age. He still acts like a little boy, despite the fact that he may be in his thirties—his twenties—his forties, or what have you. The individual still shows the selfishness that was normal when he was an infant, but which now is no longer normal. He shows the ability to take but not to give. He shows complete irresponsibility: an inability to take on any responsibility. When he doesn't get the things he wants his wife to give him; because he is always on the taking end, he has temper tantrums. He raises hell. He throws things around. He is still, at the age of twenty or thirty or forty, the same emotionally immature child that he was at the age of one or two or five.

This individual, because he has never developed the capacity for love—the ability to give of himself to another person—frequently becomes extremely frustrated. When he becomes extremely frustrated, he will frequently take to alcohol. Then alcohol becomes the presenting problem. But it is important for you to remember that alcohol frequently is simply a coverup for an individual's emotional immaturity, which in turn shows that he has never made the normal transition from the selfishness of infancy to the altruism of so-called emotional maturity.

The second factor that makes for unsuccessful marriage is poor sex attitudes. I have already shown you, in talking about the manner in which the normal sex attitude develops, how some of these attitudes become abnormal. This occurs, generally, through the things that the individual is told or the things that he is not told by the parents. It may derive from the manner in which the parents, when the youngster was growing up, let the child know either directly or by innuendo that sex was bad, nasty, dirty, sinful or a host of other things that certainly do not make for normal compatibility in marriage.

There are some specific things that we run into that cause marriages to fall down that are definitely concerned with the sexual attitude. One of these, most common in females, is frigidity. Frigidity is a psychological state in which the wife, the female, is completely unable to derive any satisfaction from the sexual act.

Having told you before about the manner in which the girl should have become identified with the mother after rejecting the father, I can now assure you that frigidity is not something

that happens to people because God is mad at them. Frigidity is simply the condition that occurs because the little girl didn't have the opportunity to get close to her mother at the age of seven. Perhaps the mother didn't like her. Perhaps the mother was interested in boys. The mother may have had too many other children. For one reason or another the mother was too disinterested and instead of being able to get close to her mother, this little girl had no choice but to remain attached to the father figure.

There is certainly nothing wrong with fathers—I like them personally. I'm a father myself. But no matter how good a father is, he is not a female, and he can't, by the farthest stretch of the imagination, give his daughter the attributes of femininity that she needs. The daughter that becomes too closely attached to the father begins unconsciously to feel that her father is her ideal male figure. This means, unfortunately, that when she grows up her husband becomes unconsciously for her the ideal male figure, namely, her father, and sex for her, then unconsciously becomes incest—and incest certainly is not a condition which makes for compatibility in sex or in marriage. For the girl who unconsciously feels that any sexuality is incestuous becomes extremely guilty and fearful and consequently loses all the normal desire that should be present in the marital state.

Let's take the other half of the crime—the male. There are specific sexual attitudes that occur with the male. Impotence or near impotence as well as premature ejaculation are conditions which are not theoretical. We frequently see them in our offices, and we definitely know that these cause a great deal of difficulty in trying to keep a marriage together.

But I want you to know that impotence or near impotence or premature ejaculation is something which occurs, generally, in a boy who has not had the opportunity to become closely enough identified with his father. He has not been able, therefore, to take on from his father the normal masculine attitudes of aggressiveness, forcefulness, and independence. He has been too closely attached to his mother figure and has taken on, from the mother figure, the only things she could offer him: dependency and passivity. While these are very fine for a girl, they obviously are very bad for a boy in our culture.

The third important reason for unsuccessful marriage or divorce, as I am sure all psychiatrists see it, is the personality defect that goes with the wrong kind of identification that the child gets with its mother and/or its father.

Take a look to see what happens to the passive, dependent male. Remember that our society expects the male to be aggressive, to be able to take responsibility, to be able to handle competitive situations, and to be forceful. But the individual, who comes to marriage and instead of being aggressive and forceful is just the opposite, begins to be threatened by anything adequate that his wife does. Because he is so passive, anything that his wife does is more adequate than what he does.

She, in turn, so far as he is concerned, becomes relatively more aggressive than he; and he then feels so unconsciously threatened that not only does he neglect to praise her for the good things that she does, but he begins to belittle her. Ultimately, in too many cases, he actually will hit her. All of your cases of assault in marriage are due, at least to a great extent, to this unconscious threat that the passive male feels toward his wife who appears relatively much more forceful and aggressive than he.

Let's turn the situation around. Say that the girl is normally aggressive but appears to be much more aggressive because her husband is too passive. Or say that the girl, having identified too strongly with her father, is indeed an aggressive female. What happens? She finds in a very short time that this man to whom she was supposed to have been married isn't a man at all. He's a boy. She finds that he can't carry through a normal, masculine, male function in which he would take care of her. She finds that she has to take care of him. She must take the responsibilities of marriage. She must do the things necessary to protect him.

These three factors, then, which you recognize as the converse of the successful marriage components, are the factors that, in my experience, have proved to be the most important attributes that make for unsuccessful marriage or divorce. In review, these are emotional immaturity—the inability to develop the capacity for love; poor attitudes concerned with sex problems and sex feeling—and these, remember, come from the kind of attitudes the child develops in growing up; and finally, personality defects in which the individual identifies with the wrong parent. Remember, this is not in any case the child's fault, but, too frequently, it is due to the fact that the father is too busy, the father is away, the father is dominated by a mother figure or to some other type of thing occurring in a home situation.

What's the moral of this story? So far as the girl is concerned—and all of us who have a daughter, I believe, must think about this: it's not enough just to teach her that in seeking a husband she must make sure she gets some man with whom she has common interests, or to make sure she gets a man who has nice looks and the social graces. For heaven's sake, let's teach her also that she should have a long enough courtship so that she is able to observe this future husband of hers in enough situations to be able to determine if this fellow is sufficiently aggressive or to find if she is marrying a passive individual who is going to give her great trouble!

So far as you—lawyers and prospective lawyers—are concerned, please try to be aware of these psychological factors. They are terribly important, because upon these factors depends the success or failure of doing something about patching up these marriages which otherwise definitely will break apart.

The preceding article was transcribed from a recording made by the Lawyers' Service Bureau, 120 West 13th Avenue, Denver, Colorado.